



COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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Part	Section	Subject	Policy No.	Review Date
Administration and Management	General Administration	Contact with Public and Media	1.1.8	
ACA Standards	3-ALDF-1A-19 Media Access			
Consent Decree	<u>Paragraph 54 Develop Facility Policies and Procedures</u>			

I. PURPOSE

To describe the methods that will be used by the Department of Corrections (DOC) in providing accurate and timely information to the public, media and other agencies.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Department of Corrections to provide accurate and timely information to the public, media and other agencies consistent with preserving the security and privacy of the Department, its staff and the inmates.

III. PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

Since the overwhelming majority of the public and/or the media has neither visited a corrections facility nor been directly involved with offenders, there is an increasing reliance on media and/or other organizations as the primary source of information regarding the Department's activities. Public opinion of DOC is very important. How the DOC is perceived depends in large part on the staff. In an effort to facilitate positive relations with the public and the media, DOC staff will strive to answer inquiries in an accurate, open and timely manner, keeping in mind the Department's security concerns and in compliance with all statutes governing confidentiality, public information and the rights of privacy. The DOC staff will work closely with other agencies to ensure that the mission of the Department is accomplished. The Department will not deny any news media, groups, organizations or individuals any information to which they are legally entitled.

A. PUBLIC/MEDIA RELATIONS

The Department of Corrections Public Information Officer (PIO) and/or the Division Directors will provide verbal and/or written information to the media about the facility. Accurate and complete information is to be provided to the public/media on a regular basis. Efforts to inform the public, through a wide-range of opportunities including but not limited to the media, about constructive correctional programs and incidents must be done on a routine basis in order for the public to be

better informed about the Department's activities and programs. Every effort should be made to make these media contacts in a timely fashion in order to assist the media in meeting deadlines.

Employees of the Department of Corrections will not comment to the news media or publish original material that refers to the Department of Corrections by name or inference without prior approval from the Commissioner of Corrections. Employees who wish to speak to the media as private citizens, not as representatives of the DOC, should make those media contacts during off-duty hours, and should make it clear to the media that they are representing their own personal views, not those of the DOC. All correspondence and/or telephone inquiries from government agencies, legislative bodies, CNMI/FEDERAL courts, law enforcement agencies, the general public and representatives of the news media will be forwarded to the Commissioner of Corrections for response. Employees of the Department of Corrections will respond to legitimate inquiries relating to the DOC and/or inmate that are considered public information. In cases where there is likely to be a delay in response (with good cause), an interim response will be provided.

The following are considered public information as it relates to the inmate:

1. Name of the inmate
2. Date of birth/age
3. Case number
4. Crime/s arrested for
5. Sentence and criminal conviction record
6. Date of arrest or sentenced
7. Time and place of arrest
8. Arresting officer's name unless the officer is engaged in undercover operations.
9. Amount of bail set
10. Scheduled court dates.
11. Date of commitment/release
12. Date eligible for parole
13. Name of arresting agency
14. Inmate death, the name will be withheld until next of kin has been notified.
15. Mug shots when an inmate escapes.

The following information shall not be release to the public and/or the media:

1. The identity of any victim of a sex crime or any related information, which, if divulged, could lead to the victim's identity.
2. The identity of victims or witnesses if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation, or if it would place the victim or witnesses in personal danger.

3. The identity of any juvenile who is a suspect or defendant in a case unless the juvenile is being tried as an adult.
4. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin.
5. Information, which, if prematurely released, may interfere with the investigation or apprehension of a suspect.
6. Information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings.
7. Specific cause of death unless officially determined by the pathologist.
8. Gag order by any court of law regarding information concerning a crime or event.
9. The home address and telephone number of any DPS/DOC staff.
10. Identity, statement or expected testimony of any witness or victim.
11. Any opinion about the guilt or innocence of a defendant or the merits of the case.
12. Plea bargain agreement or other pretrial action.
13. The identity of suspects prior to arrest unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger.
14. Prior criminal conviction record, character or reputation of a defendant.
15. Suspects or accused person in custody shall not be posed or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts or interviews, nor shall Division personnel pose with suspects or accused person in custody.

B. TECHNIQUES FOR BETTER MEDIA RELATIONS

1. Be a professional.
2. Be open and cooperative. Never lie.
3. Personalize your Department/Division.
4. Develop media contacts.
5. Take good stories to them.
6. Respond quickly.
7. KISS – Keep it short/simple.
8. Never say "No Comment."
9. Never offer your personal opinion. State the facts only.
10. Refer the reporter to the proper source.
11. Do not guarantee anything.
12. Don't be late.
13. Be prepared. Practice.
14. Explain why you can't provide certain information.
15. Don't use jargons.
16. Find out what topics the reporter wants to discuss.
17. There is no such thing as "Off the Record."
18. Check the accuracy of all facts.
19. Don't be upset with reporters.
20. It's okay to say "I Don't Know." (But I'll find out)
21. If you screw up, confess and repent.

22. Use the big dump. Taking responsibility and admitting a mistake.
23. Prepare for a media disaster.
24. Understand how the media operates.

C. INSTITUTIONAL VISITS

Institutional visits by members of the court, legislative bodies, or other criminal justice agencies and departments are encouraged and will be arranged by the Commissioner of Corrections. Media visits to DOC facilities provide useful information of public interest. It shall be clearly understood by DOC staff that access by the media into DOC facility is not a right since the facility is not accessible to the public. The Commissioner of Corrections must approve pre-arranged facility tour by the media. In an emergency, the media and other visitors will be restricted from visiting the facility until the Commissioner has declared that the facility is safe and secured and the visit is approved. Random, unescorted access to the DOC facilities is prohibited.

C. NEWS RELEASES

News release is a direct statement to the media about an event, program, or policy. It is a vehicle for communicating with the public about your institution via newspaper, radio and television. The goal is to ensure the accurate reporting of information to the public. The following seven steps should be considered when dealing with the media and the public:

1. Define the issue

PIO should not respond to questions other than routine questions without knowing the background of the inquiry. The media and the public will be told that information will be obtained prior to answering questions. The PIO should inquire from the public/media the kind of questions they want answered and to seek the person that can answer the question. The PIO is not obligated to answer questions directly to the public or the media. If the information being requested cannot be made available immediately, inform the public/media that the information will be provided later taking into consideration the public/media deadline for the information. If the PIO cannot answer the public/media inquiry, an explanation must be provided.

2. Gather facts and prepare organizational messages

The organization's message is the Department's position. This message must be repeated throughout the interview. The message must be simple, focused, concise and limited in number especially if it is the electronic media. The message should be supported by facts.

3. Brainstorm Potential Questions

Write down questions both tough and simple that the reporter might ask and be prepared to answer them.

4. Answer the Questions in Writing

Writing out answers to questions can be used during rehearsal and can be referred to during the actual interview. Written answers will ensure that the organizational message is delivered and is

a source for follow-up questions from the media. It will ensure that the responses are consistent and save preparation time.

5. Rehearse Out Loud

Rehearsal greatly reduces anxiety and helps to ensure that organization's message is delivered. The PIO should have other personnel role play the reporter by asking tough and easy questions. The role players should critique the performance and update the written answers.

6. Set Ground Rules During the Callback

When a reporter or anyone requesting information is told to callback for the information, the PIO should have the information available as agreed. The PIO should reiterate the subject matter to the person requesting the information to ensure that they are in agreement with the topic(s). The PIO should advise the person the issues that cannot be discussed and the reasons why. This will avoid false expectations and misunderstandings, which can lead to, strained relations. The parameters of the interview should also be established during the callback.

7. Conduct the Interview

In conducting an interview, listen carefully to the questions that are asked. Get the Department's message out early and often. If the reporter asked "Is there anything else?" repeat the key points. Look at the reporter and not the camera. Don't be upset at the reporter if the same questions are being asked again. Remember the don'ts when speaking to the media and/or the public. The image of the Department as well as yourself is at stake.

D. MEDIA RELATIONS DURING AN EMERGENCY

Media access to the facility during emergency such as riots and hostage taking will be denied until the Commissioner of Corrections lifted the restriction. To ensure that the media have access to newsworthy events and to promote mutual trust and understanding where the mission of law enforcement and the media are fulfilled, the PIO will establish a staging area that is accessible, but away from the incident so they will not interfere with the work of tactical commanders or negotiators. The PIO will coordinate with spokespersons from other agencies responding to the emergency to eliminate redundancies with respect to the release of information. The staging area should be the site for all news releases.

The staging area should have access to bathrooms, telephones, and sufficient chairs, tents, tables and other amenities such as water and coffee for the media. The area should have sufficient space for parking and television equipment set up and close enough to the facility without compromising safety and security.

From the start, the PIO will brief the media about the following concerns:

1. The PIO will make it clear to the media that news releases will be made available as they develop. The scheduled news releases will be announced if the emergency appears that it will take time to be resolved. At the first news release, the PIO will provide to the media complete and accurate information in accordance with the above techniques in dealing with the media.

2. The release of detailed information such as tactics and strategies will not be release if it will compromise the safety of the people involved.
3. The media should be asked to voluntarily withhold sensitive information where the premature release of information would interfere with the success of the operation or compromise the safety of officers and hostages.
4. The media should be asked to notify law enforcement authorities if the hostage takers call them. When called, the media should not negotiate with the hostage takers or try to resolve the incident.
5. The Media will be asked to avoid the use of television lights and/or night-vision cameras that will illuminate law enforcement positions or contribute to a circus-like atmosphere.
6. The media will be asked to cooperate with negotiators if law enforcement decides to offer hostage takers access to the media.
7. The media will be asked not to read demands verbatim but instead should paraphrase them using generalized language.
8. The media should be asked to delay the broadcast of information about a hostage taker's mental condition, state of mind, or reasons for actions until the standoff has ended. They should avoid descriptive language that could set off the hostage takers.
9. The media will be inform that inmates will not be interviewed during the emergency.

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10-25-07

Date

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Commissioner of Corrections

10/25/07

Date